

MINUTES
COUNCIL DISTRICT ADVISORY
TASK FORCE

Tuesday, February 11, 2003



Human Resources Pinnacle Room
7575 E. Main Street
Scottsdale, Arizona

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Present:	Jeffrey Abts	William McCluskey
	Susan Bitter Smith	Michael Pickett
	James Derouin	Roberta Pilcher
	Suzanne Klapp	Wendy Riddell
	Barbara Klein	Donald Scott
	George Knowlton	Lida Stewart
	Wendy Lyons	James Wellington

Also Present:

Deputy City Attorney Donna Bronski
Government Relations Coordinator Peggy Carpenter
Deputy City Clerk Carolyn Jagger
Executive Assistant Jeff Kulaga

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Susan Bitter Smith called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

SPEAKERS

Mesa City Clerk Barbara Jones gave the group a brief history of districting in the City of Mesa. In 1992, a citizen's group was successful in placing a full district system initiative on the ballot. The Mesa City Council decided to place an additional option on the ballot that would offer a blended form of districting to the Mesa voters. Both initiatives failed; however, the full district system failed by a much smaller margin than the blended proposed by the Council.

In 1997, a citizen's group was again successful in placing a full district system on the March 1997 primary election ballot. This time the Council did not choose to bring a Council initiative forward, and the citizen's initiative was successful.

Ms. Jones told the group that after the voters approved a district system for Mesa, they soon discovered that there was a lot of work to be done.

Ms. Jones stated that Mesa City officials were surprised by the small number of candidates that ran for district seats and that the number was much less than expected. When asked if candidates ran from areas where there had been few or no candidates before, she responded yes.

Ms. Jones also reported that voter turnout did not increase as expected. For example, in 1996, before districting, voter turnout was 20%. In 1998, voter turnout was also 20%. In 2000, voter turnout rose to 32%; however, because of the large number of ballot questions that year, Ms. Jones did not believe that the 12% increase could be entirely attributed to districting. In 2002, the City of Mesa realized a 22% voter turnout. Ms. Jones did not believe they had enough history with districting to determine a trend for voter turnout.

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In response to a question about what drove citizens to develop a districting initiative, Ms. Jones stated that it was an activist group that did not feel they were being represented on the Council. She also told the group that to be elected under Mesa's districting system you must be a Mesa resident for two years.

Ms. Jones gave a brief overview of the costs of running a district election. She stated that there were several areas that caused the cost of district elections to increase:

1. Multiple versions of the ballot had to be printed.
2. Candidate packet information had to be more customized than the generic versions Mesa had used in the past.
3. Publicity pamphlets contain sample ballots, which caused the size and cost of printing the pamphlet to increase.
4. Any maps that were included in election material had to be by district, which meant more maps had to be produced and printed.
5. Early voting reports had to be prepared by district, rather than for the city as a whole.

Overall, Ms. Jones estimated that election costs initially increased by 10 to 15 percent.

Ms. Jones introduced Mr. Eric Norenberg, also from the City of Mesa, to discuss Mesa's redistricting process.

By law, the City of Mesa is required to redistrict after every census (every ten years). For this reason, Mesa had to go through both an initial districting process and, then, within a few years it had to go through a redistricting process. Mr. Norenberg explained to the group the criteria given to the consultant that was hired by the City of Mesa after the 2000 Census to conduct the redistricting process: keep seated councilmembers within the districts that elected them, and stay as close as possible to the original district boundaries.

Mesa spent approximately \$165,000 to redistrict, which included \$20,000 for legal services. The remainder of the money was spent on the consultant, National Demographics Corporation, and the cost for public involvement, such as advertising and public information pieces.

Some of the goals of the redistricting process were to provide for a balanced population in each district, while allowing for increasing population in districts where growth was anticipated; to keep districts compact and contiguous; and to have the lines follow natural and manmade boundaries. The City of Mesa also felt it was very important to involve citizens and to keep neighborhoods together.

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To be successful, Mr. Norenberg stated that the redistricting process needs lots of public outreach. To do this, the City of Mesa distributed Citizen Involvement Kits which included printed information, a map, and a Mylar grid that a citizen could use to draw his or her own boundaries and submit it to the consultant for consideration. The committee received only 15 completed kits back. The consultant reviewed each of them, analyzed the data, and then provided a written response to the citizen who submitted it within two business days. This information was also provided to the US Justice Department as part of the city's preclearance submittal.

Mr. Norenberg told the Task Force that the Mayor, Council, and City of Mesa expended a great deal of effort to get candidates to run within the districts, but were disappointed with the low number of candidates that did run. He noted that all of the candidates that ran in the last election were new to the process.

In looking at the political side of districting, Mr. Norenberg said that Councilmembers needed to think smaller. Councilmembers in districts become much more knowledgeable about their district, and cited crime statistics and traffic issues as examples. Mr. Norenberg stated that citizens like having only one person to call when they have a problem or concern. In addition, the media can focus on the district Councilmember, rather than on the entire Council, when an issue arises within a given district.

Councilmembers found they were much busier under a district system. Phone calls, visitors, and e-mails all increased, and there were more meetings to attend. Councilmembers also tend to do more outreach within their districts, and may distribute newsletters or conduct pancake breakfasts to reach out to constituents.

In response to a question, Mr. Norenberg affirmed that appointments to boards and commissions has and is continuing to change. It is a goal of the Mayor to balance the composition of all the commissions to include members from each district, and a concerted effort is being made to get candidates from all districts.

A member of the group asked if coalitions and political action committees had more influence under an at-large system and less influence under a district system. Mr. Norenberg stated that Mesa found the opposite to be the case: in Mesa, coalitions and political action committees believe they have more influence under a district system.

Mr. Norenberg stated that it is too early in the process for Mesa to have experienced most of the pitfalls that have been attributed to district systems, citing infighting over resources as an example of something Mesa has yet to encounter. Mr. Norenberg acknowledged that Mesa did hire more staff as the result of districting. The first assistant to the Mesa City Council was hired in the summer of 1997. In 1999, a secretary was added to the Council's staff. Currently, the Council shares three assistants. Mr. Norenberg said that it was understood that each Councilmember would eventually need his or her own staff person once the transition to districting was complete.

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When asked why more staff is required, Mr. Norenberg stated that the assistants and secretary spend a great deal of their time dealing with constituents and constituent issues. After districting, the Council began receiving a much higher volume of phone calls, e-mails, and visitors. The Councilmembers also do outreach programs that generate more traffic and direct contact from constituents.

When the districting system was implemented, the Council requested district-related funding in the budget to cover the costs of newsletters, travel, breakfasts, and other outreach efforts. To insure that the funds were spent appropriately, guidelines were developed. Initially, each Councilmember was allocated \$20,000; however, due to budget cuts, this funding has been reduced to \$10,000. In addition, each Councilmember receives a fax machine and a laptop.

Staff reports to Council have been modified to identify whether or not the issue under consideration is a district or citywide concern. However, to prevent problems, operational boundaries are not tied into district boundaries. For example, recycling pickup routes did not change. Mr. Norenberg stated that it has taken some time, but staff has learned to think about what a Councilmember needs to know to be more effective in his or her district. As a result, the type and format of the information that staff provides has changed. This has caused the time that staff spends researching and gathering information to increase. The content of the agenda has not changed, but the individual items contain much more detailed information than before districting.

Mr. Norenberg said that there has not been any attempt to recall any of the Councilmembers elected under the district system, but Mesa Councilmembers are more vulnerable to a recall effort because of the lower number of signatures that are required.

MINUTES

Hearing no additions or corrections, the chair called for a motion to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2003 meeting of the District Advisory Task Force. Wendy Riddell so moved, which was seconded by Roberta Pilcher.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF MATERIALS

The Chair called on staff representative Donna Bronski to review the material contained in the evening's packet of handouts. Ms. Bronski went through the list of ten handouts and gave a brief explanation of each one.

Mr. James Derouin, who had prepared handouts #5 and #8, provided an overview of each, as well as two other handouts that were not in the packet prepared by staff but were given out during the meeting.

Ms. Barbara Klein presented the Chair with a handout that she asked to have copied and distributed to the Task Force at the next meeting. Ms. Klein will review the handout at the next meeting in conjunction with a PowerPoint presentation that she put together.

FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE

The Chair suggested that the Task Force discuss the remaining three items: (1) Discussion and setting of future meeting schedule; (2) Discussion and possible adoption of District Task Force work plan; and (3) Discussion and possible setting of public hearing dates, as one item.

After reviewing and discussing the proposed draft calendar, a new calendar was drafted. City staff was directed to finalize the new schedule and send it out to the Task Force members immediately (attached).

In response to a request from the chair for names of future speakers, Barbara Klein asked if there was interest in inviting someone from the Center for Voting and Democracy to address the group. The Chair asked Ms. Klein to bring some information about the Center to the next meeting so that the group could determine if there was interest in having someone speak.

The chair asked if the Task Force members wanted staff to prepare any materials for the next meeting. A request was made to have staff prepare a map indicating where members of the Planning Commission reside.

It was asked if a Task Force member could attend meetings via teleconferencing if he or she had to be out of town on a scheduled meeting date. **After determining that teleconferencing was feasible, the chair asked for a motion to allow for teleconferencing with sufficient notice to allow staff to make the necessary arrangements. James Derouin so moved, which was seconded by Roberta Pilcher. The motion passed unanimously.**

A member asked if the Charter Review Committee would have to review any recommendation made by the Task Force before it could be presented to the Council. Donna Bronski explained there is no active City Charter Review Committee at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Task Force member George Knowlton moved to adjourn. Task Force member Roberta Pilcher seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m. The next meeting of the District Advisory Task Force is 6:00 p.m., Tuesday, February 25, 2003 in the Human Resources Pinnacle Room.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I hereby certify that the foregoing Minutes are a true and correct copy of the Minutes of the Council District Advisory Task Force held on the 11th day of February 2003.

I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held, and that a quorum was present.

DATED this _____ day of February 2003.

CAROLYN JAGGER
Deputy City Clerk